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ABSTRACT

Public schools are responsible for ensuring that all citizens are prepared for success. An analysis of the needs of high risk students and the introduction of the idea of an "Equality School" are described in this report. Research suggests that too many young people, many of whom come from minority groups, are forced to live and learn on the margins of school life (Sinclair and Ghory, 1987). "Equality Schools" (good schools where all students of all families are learning well) try to help marginal students return to productive learning. The images of schools that promote equality, along with educators' goals of greater equality in schools, are described. Some common characteristics of Equality Schools are provided and the special nature of learning environments where the goal of equality is taken seriously are explored. Although no universal formula characterizes Equality Schools, such schools typically feature the following: educators who believe that all children have the capacity to learn at high levels of accomplishment; educator who can identify the real problems blocking student learning and who can set priorities to improve the learning of all students; that all students learn well, that children should not be sorted into permanent groupings; that diversity is recognized as a strength and promotes learning; that leadership comes from all members of the educational community; and that educators can develop an internal capacity to evaluate student progress, teacher effectiveness, and the quality of their school. (RJM)

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THE PROMISE OF EQUALITY SCHOOLS: IMPROVING LEARNING OF MARGINAL STUDENTS

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REALITY OF MARGINALITY AND PROMISE OF EQUALITY SCHOOLS

Public schools are responsible for ensuring that all citizens, not just an elite few, are prepared for success in our society. Significant progress is being made to accomplish this end, but much work remains to be done. For example, the greatest division in our country is between those who develop the academic competencies and social skills needed to realize the American dream, and those who do not have a fair chance for economic security, life-long learning, meaningful work, and constructive civic involvement. This is why we consider equality in American public schools a primary focus for reform. Educators need to create conditions in local schools so that all children learn well, regardless of the inequality of their circumstances.

Research suggests and experience shows that too many young people are forced to live and learn on the margins of school life (Sinclair and Ghory, 1987). What happens on the margins? Here, on the fringes, significant numbers of young people are separated from the very conditions and resources intended to help them learn well. These marginal students balance on a thin line separating academic success from mediocrity or failure. If students lean (or are pushed by the school environment) toward underachievement or failure in school, they risk becoming marginal. For the considerable number of students who do cross the line and become marginal, the opportunities for learning and for receiving a quality education are less than for successful learners. Marginal students, then, have unequal access to knowledge and are limited to educational experiences that do not encourage them to learn well. Over time, this unproductive relationship with the curriculum of the school limits their life and educational options. Unless the situation of these marginal students is considered, the current educational reform movement will have little impact on increasing equality of opportunity and academic excellence for a sizable population of young people.

The concern for these deserving students intensifies when caring citizens and committed educators realize that a large portion of this marginal population consists of children from poor homes who are often African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian. For example, the Education Trust in Washington, D.C. recently reported that the academic achievement of students representing these groups is significantly lower than that of their white counterparts. The data in this report show that students of color from adverse economic circumstances perform well below other students in all academic subjects, and this achievement gap has actually grown during the past six years (The Education Trust, 1996). Sadly, it seems that students who start with less are given less in school.

We realize that the practice of comparing achievement scores across groups is flawed because the particular successes and failures of individuals are eclipsed by data describing the average accomplishments of groups. However, this troubling achievement gap that began to widen again in 1988 is now a serious chasm, suggesting that group scores, even with their limitations, are a revealing indicator of a severe condition of inequality that needs to be addressed. Unfortunately, the students who are forced to the margins of school life often experience unequal treatment that hinders their learning. As Ralph Tyler reminds us, "[s]cant attention is given either to the needs of these students or to their assets" (Sinclari and Ghory, p.vii). Until these marginal students benefit fully from their school experiences, public education will fall short of its ultimate purpose of providing all children of all families with an equal chance to realize their promise. Closing the achievement gap requires careful thought and wise action in our public elementary and secondary schools so that they again become a powerful means for equality in our democracy.

Our work in schools and school systems across the country shows that schools can help all children succeed in their learning and prepare them for constructive participation in our society. In this paper, we introduce the idea of an "Equality School" as a way of helping marginal students return to productive learning. Specifically, this paper has three major, interrelated parts. First, educators' images of greater equality in local schools are brought forward for consideration. These

images guide thinking and action in Equality Schools. Second, common characteristics of Equality Schools are described, so we can explore the special nature of learning environments where the goal of equality is taken seriously. Finally, we reflect on the cooperation among educators that is necessary for local schools to make equality a reality for learning.

IMAGES OF SCHOOLS THAT PROMOTE EQUALITY

From the "efficient schools" of the 1920's (Callahan, 1962) to John Goodlad's "nongraded school" (1963) in the 1960's, efforts to realign public schools and democracy have attempted to maintain an implicit image of a good school, a school where opportunities for success in learning are fairly and impartially opened to all students, including those who are marginal in their learning. More recent efforts, such as Mortimer Adler's "Paideia School" (1982), Henry Levin's "accelerated school" (1987), and Theodore Sizer's "essential school" (1992), explicitly outline imperatives they consider necessary for creating school environments that better foster the learning of all students. As educators face decisions in their classrooms and schools, they are guided by often unexplored images of how a school works best to provide quality schooling for all, on equal terms. By bringing such images into sharp focus on the idea of an Equality School, we begin to clarify the vision of educators looking for ways to help every student learn well so that they may become a productive citizen.

To this end, we join with educators in local schools to create conditions that are responsive to the varied needs of diverse individuals and are sensitive to the persistent demands of the democratic society in which they live. As a result of their commitment to the belief that it is possible for educators to design conditions in schools and classrooms so that all students reach high levels of academic accomplishment, twenty individual schools around the country entered into an experiment to become "Equality Schools."[1] As pioneers in the ongoing drive to plan and

[1] The following schools have been recognized by the National Coalition for Equality in Learning as "Equality Schools." Casey Middle School, Nederland, Ryan, and Washington Bilingual Schools (Boulder Valley); Pintlala Elementary School, Catoma Elementary School (Montgomery); McDonogh 15 Elementary School (New Orleans); Plymouth Elementary School (Plymouth Meeting); Bammel, Beneke, Hirsch, Jenkins,

implement schools appropriate in a democracy, these schools are making significant progress in providing a quality education for all children, even those youngsters who are living and trying to learn in adverse circumstances.

In the most simple terms, an Equality School is a good school, one where all students of all families are learning well. It is a place where the spirit as well as the mind are nurtured and challenged. Here, learning by conditioning is replaced by learning through the practice of creative intelligence. Forward looking educators in these schools construct learning environments where children from different backgrounds live and learn together in ways that help all youngsters succeed in school. Their success is determined by how well everyone learns, not by the accomplishments of a few. Equality Schools, then, are places where each student finds and develops something of value on which to build a life, while learning to appreciate what others offer as well. In an Equality School, the right to an education, and the resources available to advance quality learning, are balanced in such a way that all students receive their optimal benefit. To create equality in school is to promote democracy in society. In Equality Schools, this is the image that encourages careful decisions and fosters bold actions.

Unfortunately, too many schools in our communities today are places where necessary resources become disproportionately allocated. Their main concern is usually for the highly achieving students, viewed as "the best" in the school. These top students seem to get the best teachers, the best schedules, the most attention. Sometimes, a school within a school is created to provide a special setting for these "star students." The glittering accomplishments of these elite learners are the pride of the community, the hallmark for what makes the school good. Yet, in and around these schools, nagging questions remain. How equitable is the access to the best learning environments?[2] What is the plight of the learner with average scores in the high-achieving

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Link, Ponderosa, Salyers, Smith, Twin Creeks, Winship, and Wunsche Schools (Spring); Juan Linn (Victoria).

[2] In a major national study, John I. Goodlad, A Place Called School (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981) documents the significant discrepancies in curriculum and pedagogy between high and low tracks in American schools.

environment? Who goes lacking while others gain? When we hear of a good school, it seems that there is no assurance that equality is an imperative for learning or that diversity is a strength of community. Too often in these schools youngsters are sorted into top, middle, and bottom groups where they are expected to learn at different rates and various levels of accomplishment. The result is that many children are forced to the margins of school life where they do not benefit in fair and proportional ways from the environment intended to help all of them succeed in their learning.

However, educators in Equality Schools take action for learning by asking: under what particular conditions do individual students learn well? In Equality Schools they look first to the student, realizing that individuals learn--groups do not learn. These schools consist of varied conditions forming a unique learning community that recognizes and supports diversity, instead of ignoring and suppressing it. Nothing short of an enduring commitment to all our children learning from challenging educational experiences will suffice if we truly expect public schools to progress anywhere close to a state of both excellence and equality. This is another image that guides educators who lead Equality Schools.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EQUALITY SCHOOLS

Given the variability of learners and the diversity of school environments, there is no universal formula defining conditions under which all students learn well. Yet, intriguing possibilities emerge when educators and parents start to identify and resolve important problems blocking the learning of students in particular schools. We begin to see characteristics that may be common to Equality Schools. The intention is not to suggest that all of these characteristics exist in each location, all of the time, and at the same intensity. Rather, the purpose is to explore the possibilities of equality that can be realized by determined educators in local schools. Collectively, seven characteristics are starting to form the personality or ecology of schools that are trying to reach all students. These characteristics seem to give texture to the educational environments in Equality Schools. Let us now consider briefly each of these characteristics in turn.

In Equality Schools, educators believe that all children have the capacity to learn at high levels of accomplishment and a right to a quality education on equal terms.

Equality Schools operate on the premise that all students are capable of high levels of intellectual accomplishment, including those young people who are failing or underachieving. Educators in these schools are discovering that students differ more in the speed and mode in which they learn than by what they are capable of learning. These discoveries naturally have far-reaching implications for how instruction is organized and delivered. Further, teachers and principals are finding that factors frequently examined as potential barriers to learning--such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or household composition--do not necessarily have to impede child development or learning. The crucial issue here is that educators in Equality Schools recognize their responsibility to adapt their practices to solve learning problems, regardless of the students' starting point, or the circumstances surrounding their lives. Learning is the result of interaction between the child and the environment. Hence, failure is not attributable to what is in the child alone.

All teachers do not walk through the school doors with these beliefs. Such matters of conviction have to be argued explicitly, in faculty meetings and study teams that gather after students have left for the day. A good part of the work of an Equality School is to develop a platform of premises to guide thoughts and actions. Educators in local schools are challenged to define the major problems their own students are having with their learning. Discussion of these problems may strike deeply at the pride and the self-doubts of teachers and principals, making discussion sometimes sharply realistic about what common learning can be expected from all children. It takes time, trouble, and leadership from several quarters to develop a consensus that will support and sustain school improvement and foster increased learning. An important characteristic of Equality Schools, then, is their explicit commitment to spirited dialogue and mindful action, guided by articulated premises about the importance of reaching all students. It seems reasonable for schools striving to become Equality Schools to craft a statement of beliefs,

written at the local school and agreed to by all faculty. We are finding that agreement on these premises is a pre-requisite for searching and constructive self-study and meaningful and lasting reform.

In Equality Schools, educators can identify the real problems blocking the learning of students and can set priorities for improving the learning of all students so that problem solving becomes a way of life.

So much energy in schools goes into carrying the established program forward in tried-and-true ways that it is a real accomplishment for a school staff to step back from their demanding routine and agree on the most troubling problems that face their students. Some of the problems teachers and principals find in this process are their own problems as individuals and groups, so identifying them requires an unusual level of honesty and group self-awareness. When a mature faculty defines learning problems and considers the obstacles in the school and home environments that may be blocking learning, they can better set priorities for improved learning. Study teams are often formed to carry on the analysis and to devise and try out solutions. This keeps their focus on the ends they are trying to accomplish and lets them avoid being seduced by the facile adoption of the first suggested means that come to mind for intervention. In Equality Schools, we are finding a momentum is created for improvement by careful adherence to a simple planning cycle--problem identification, priority setting, experimentation with interventions, re-consideration of the problem.

One of the early schools recognized as an Equality School, the Mildred Jenkins Elementary School in Spring, Texas, set a priority to improve reading comprehension for every student. Three study teams went into action: weekly Child Study Teams focused on students at risk of failure due to severe reading difficulties; a broader study team looked at special groups of students and reasons for trouble in reading comprehension, offering an opportunity for professional development for the staff as well as a forum for planning reading instruction; a third Campus Advisory Committee, including parents, teachers and administrators, met monthly to pay attention to the so-called average student who might be overlooked. This group also mobilized community support for students in need of medical, housing, food, or other social services. The combined efforts of study teams created a series of improvements, including fourteen changes in roles and

responsibilities of faculty to provide a more balanced instructional staff at each grade level, re-direction of existing funds for reading improvement, before- and after-school tutorials for marginal students, recognition programs for readers, and school business partnerships providing incentives for reading gains. Not only did children's reading scores rise on annual state achievement tests, but all members of the school community felt a sense of energy, enthusiasm, and excitement emerge from their positive forward momentum. It seems that once this cycle begins in an Equality School, problem solving becomes a way of life.

In Equality Schools, it is possible to help all students learn well without holding back any children who have a history of excellence in learning.

In most schools where resources are tightly stretched, the prospect of reaching out to even more students to help them learn well creates the fear that other children will now backslide, or suffer. The fear is that resources will be re-directed away from those who have been succeeding and given to others in need, and that this will be done at the expense of those who excelled in the past. What we are finding in Equality Schools is that everyone gains when learning activities promote participation for all students.

At the Winship Elementary School in Spring, Texas, the faculty agreed on a profoundly simple priority--to challenge every child every day. They wanted to motivate and catch up students who were falling behind, while keeping their "achieving majority" moving quickly through their paces. This simple principle--every child, every day--meant that no one should go home without learning something new. The idea had unassailable appeal, and it sharpened teachers' and students' critical awareness about who was making important progress. Their pursuit of activities that challenged the student at the top of the class and also encouraged the student previously at the bottom of the class is an ongoing one that spawned notable increases in parental involvement and re-organization of special education resources, so that sorting is replaced by inclusion.

Equality Schools, virtually by definition, are concerned that progress for some is not at the expense of others. This concern leads to productive exchanges among teachers searching for better ways to create and organize physical, social, and intellectual conditions in classrooms so that the

entire range of students stays involved and productive. Also, in Equality Schools, teachers continually experiment with clever ways to keep tabs on the progress of individuals. In this sense, the mission of Equality Schools directs educators to professional development concerns; and a lively, critical curiosity about student learning results from the desire to help all children reach high levels of accomplishment.

In Equality Schools, children are not sorted into permanent groupings that suggest that some children are better than others.

One stubborn obstacle to equality in school settings is the belief by many educators that students need to be sorted to be taught efficiently. Most evaluation systems used in schools reinforce this presumption by rewarding those at high levels of achievement with steady promotion to exclusive learning environments with increasingly more abundant resources to promote advanced learning. These high status settings bring together top teachers, rigorous curriculum, and dynamic students in a potent mix. Outside these special places, however, learning often languishes among those who start to believe they do not have all that it takes and they cannot be all that they would like to be. Even further out on the fringes are the dumping grounds, like special education or alternative schools in some districts, where students who do not fit into the prevailing learning environment are consigned and accommodated without real prospects.

In Equality Schools, educators recognize that not all learners are created equal in their discrete abilities; but believe that, by looking broadly at the range of human talents and skills, it is possible to find in every unique child human strengths that deserve to be celebrated and developed. The more narrow the range of talents that are celebrated in school, the more likely it is that groups need to be formed that separate those most accomplished in the selected talent from those less skilled. Since a wide range of children's abilities and preparation presents a management challenge for a teacher, temporary groupings can make sense for specific purposes. These may be teachable groups that dissolve after their purpose is accomplished. Equality Schools place their emphasis on finding ways to capitalize on human diversity. Educators look for ways to enrich instruction through the inclusion of a variety of students. They make sure that groupings remain flexible, so

that all students meet on common ground for most of the day. For this reason, we have seen a significant decline in the number of students identified for special education, and a change in the design of special education services in Equality Schools. The special education staff now work in co-teaching arrangements in the regular classrooms. Equality Schools recognize and treat human variability in different ways, but are committed to allocating their resources so that the total group benefits from these differences without allowing the advantages to accrue only to a favored few.

In Equality Schools, diversity is recognized as a strength for promoting learning.

Many schools we serve across the country have seen the level of racial, economic, linguistic, and cultural diversity increase steadily among their students over the last five years. Demographically, the face of America is once again changing, bringing with these changes new realities and exciting possibilities for public schools. When students from many backgrounds sit around the same table, their voices can reveal unexpected facets to familiar material and their questions can raise surprising lines of inquiry. In Equality Schools, we are finding it is possible to create a curriculum that is sensitive to the contributions of children from differing ethnic groups and various circumstances while also emphasizing the commonalties that unite all individual students. This is being done by teachers curious to expand their repertoire of materials and committed to finding books and situations for study where all of their children can see their own reflections illuminated in the curriculum. As the canon of stimulating works evolves to include voices from previously unstudied cultures, perennial questions are raised in fresh ways that benefit children from every group.

In Equality Schools, one of the priorities that keeps teachers strengthening their leadership and improving their learning is creating ways to draw upon the diversity of their students as a compelling means to promote learning. Particularly in middle schools and high schools, the students themselves are the best advocates for the advantages of diversity and a powerful source of challenge and inspiration for teachers and other students. At Apple Valley High School in Rosemount, Minnesota, for example, the entire school watched and listened intently as an improvisational troupe of Apple Valley students dramatized the cross-cultural clashes that had

begun to occur as the school's population changed, both ethnically and economically. Their performances placed the school on alert, and catalyzed concern. Similarly, multi-cultural student congresses, gay-straight clubs, student councils, and school newspaper staffs can be outstanding leaders for changes in school climate that make the environment more welcoming to diversity. In Equality Schools we have seen that students are the best role models for other students, and their voices are the best motivators for teachers to expand the scope of their curriculum.

In Equality Schools, leadership comes from all members of the educational community as they consider conditions that facilitate or hinder learning in school.

We are finding that people in most Equality Schools become skeptical about relying on top-down leadership as a way of promoting significant improvement. When the premium is placed on identifying and resolving problems that are blocking learning of individual students, the leadership of people closest to the learners--their parents, guardians, and teachers--naturally becomes paramount. In Equality Schools, it is clear that parents and guardians can work cooperatively with teachers to promote the learning of their children. In fact, significant progress with individuals having difficulty learning does not normally occur until the strengths of the home setting are combined with the strengths of the learning environment at school. All of the Equality Schools find it important to bring parents into the school in more meaningful roles than fund-raisers or audience members. Some Equality Schools started parent resource centers; others included parents on advisory councils; many improved parent-teacher conferences; others emphasized getting to know parents, grandparents, and other guardians through home visits. For example, at the Juan Linn Math and Science Magnet School in Victoria, Texas, the greatest "high-risk venture" they undertook as an Equality School was to visit the homes of each of their 670 students as a way of becoming familiar with the environment that supported learning at home. Since student achievement tends to increase when parents are familiar with the goals and directions of the curriculum, Equality Schools also seek to communicate about their purposes, programs, and progress to parents through newsletters, curriculum reports, student exhibitions, and evening meetings with members of the local community. Along with respecting the diversity of students

goes the necessity of tapping the many strengths in the home cultures of students.

Similarly, the role of teacher as leader is expected and appreciated in Equality Schools. While a principal may orchestrate, teachers as talented soloists or harmonized groups make the real music. In Equality Schools, most study teams are led by teachers, not administrators. Priorities are set by the faculty and administration working in concert, not announced from on high. When the emphasis is on improving learning, the varieties of teacher expertise also come into focus. In Equality Schools, teacher involvement increases as they find avenues for real leadership development.

In Equality Schools, educators can develop an internal capacity to evaluate student progress, teacher effectiveness, and the quality of their school.

When a school faculty sets priorities and tries to find solutions to learning problems, they need to know whether learning is actually improving. Equality Schools find it is not enough to wait for the results of the next round of standardized tests, whose test items may not directly match the school's objectives, to see if they made wise choices in their interventions to help children increase their learning. Instead, Equality Schools develop the capacity to evaluate their own progress so they can continuously use data about children's learning to increase the effectiveness of their work.

As Equality Schools create ways to evaluate their own progress, they discover the need to refine and re-state their priorities, moving from the general to the particular, setting more objective criteria for judging if desired outcomes are accomplished. They become more purposeful and systematic about evaluation, by planning data collection at the same time they determine new problem-solving strategies. Their annual evaluation reports to the community become more subtle, precise, and complete as they fight the tendency to highlight positive information, and downplay or ignore negative information. With the help of national and district study teams on evaluation, such as the one in Victoria, Texas about alternative means of assessment and the one in Spring, Texas about evaluating learning priorities, Equality Schools become more scientific and professional in their use of measurement techniques. In Equality Schools, evaluation is viewed as a helpful

instrument for improvement, not a club wielded by outside powers.

Taken together, then, these seven emerging characteristics we are discovering in Equality Schools suggest new agendas for improving schools that flow from the commitment to helping all children learn well. More than any feature, what is common to Equality Schools is the willingness of their faculty to inquire into the sources and solutions of learning problems in a manner that keeps equality foremost in mind. What teachers remember most, from their struggles to make sense of complicated learning issues, is the camaraderie and satisfaction that grows as they progress in their effectiveness to dialogue together. For example, as the Casey Middle School faculty in Boulder, Colorado grappled with the implications of rapid demographic change in the student population of their school, they discovered that they must reach beneath the first level of understanding of diversity brought to them by guest speakers and workshops on multiculturalism. By starting a reading group of teachers and parents that evolved into a study team, they gradually began to ask and answer genuinely self-critical questions about their responsiveness to diversity and their understanding of communality. A deeper level of trust and shared purpose evolved. In short, the success of an Equality School ultimately hinges on the quality of its problem solving dialogues.

CAREFUL THINKING AND ACTION IN EQUALITY SCHOOLS

The evolution of an Equality School begins with questioning by members of the school community whether all of their children are succeeding in their learning. Leaders from every cranny in the school soon realize there is no fixed solution or ready-made program that will apply to the special problems and resources in their very own dynamic and changing school culture. Once a local school community recognizes there are infinite routes of action, rather than thinking there is only one way to improve learning, they are ready to begin a process of shared inquiry into the causes and possible solutions of learning difficulties. Also, they quickly identify and celebrate the common strengths of all students and the particular strengths of individual children.

An educator's reflections and actions arise from both intellect and intuition. There develops

the continual inclination to inquire into what is needed for each student to experience success in the classroom and sense the excitement and power of learning. No one can effectively do this work for anyone else. We are seeing that a sense of inquiry must occur first on an individual level. At first, this is difficult work, but it is essential if educators are to grow in their capacity to be effective in efforts to educate young people. In turn, as teachers and principals begin to develop their own creative intelligence and reach students, they become personal and academic catalysts for others to begin crafting their ideas from understandings of the needs of children in their particular learning environment.

Equality Schools provide a setting and impetus for educators, individually and collectively, to develop ways to formulate and act on essential questions about effective teaching and learning. Working to change oneself can be a difficult challenge and a slow process; it requires intentionality, long-range commitment, a constant eye to one's vision, and careful thoughts about one's leadership. Gordon Anderson, Superintendent of Spring Texas Independent School District, notes that, "You cannot legislate changes in human behavior. Lasting change comes from within the hearts and minds of individuals."

Too often, educators decline this ever-present invitation to lead, and choose instead to reside in what are maybe more comfortable, and possibly less effective, positions of accepting answers from those who are distant from the realities persisting in schools, classrooms, and homes. Teachers and principals exist on these professional margins of inactivity, and remain so primarily because they do not take the opportunity to pursue the difficult, interesting, and relevant questions about their work with students that are posed by placing value on equality. They become comfortable imitating the successes of others. It is odd how the same educators who loudly voice dissatisfaction with children's learning become so easily preoccupied with means while ignoring ends. Under such circumstances, difficult questions become boundaries rather than openings for growth and creativity.

When we speak of marginality in public schools, we are referring fundamentally to our students who exist on the margins of successful learning. However, the learning community in an

Equality School attends to marginality of all individuals, educators and students alike. In essence, we seek to be at the edge of our perceptions all the time. From there, we can ask another vexing question, "What do we do about what we see and know?"

Educators who are prompted to follow the latent urge to affect change in themselves bring their views on education and their perceptions about their own setting into sharp focus. They question their relation to the prevailing conditions, and act upon their ideas for solving learning problems. Given responsibility for raising and answering questions, educators in local schools bring forth their most powerful creative tool, engaged and creative human intelligence. Is this not what we hope for all learners? Any effort to improve schools or increase student learning that does not have the invocation of creative and engaged human intelligence as a functional imperative takes its first and last steps as an ineffective entity for creating equality in school.

CLOSING

In sum, ideas about improving schools are guided by visions of those who work and teach in them. Unless their image of a desirable school is made explicit through continuing dialogue among the faculty and parents in a local community, there is a risk that improvement efforts will lose direction and get swept away by educational fads or pressing political pressures. Attempts to create Equality Schools encourage teachers and principals to be practical and idealistic simultaneously. The image of a school where all children of all families learn well pushes and pulls the process of inquiry beyond prescribed problem-solving by raising unseasonable questions about equality that lack expected answers. In short, then, Equality Schools grow best from the productive tension between theory and practice, the ideal and the real. They are a work in progress owned by the people closest to the learners, not a recipe teachers and principals are laboriously trained to imitate and implement. When educators begin to question together how to help all their children learn at high levels of accomplishment, they are continuing the vital American experiment of creating schools worthy of a democracy, public schools of equality.

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